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REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

International Conference on Central American Refugees

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 47/103 of 16 December 1992 on the International Conference on Central American Refugees, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other organs of the United Nations system to continue their support for and involvement in the planning, implementation, evaluation and follow-up of the programmes generated by the Conference process, and also requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its forty-eighth session on the implementation of the resolution. The following report is submitted pursuant to this request.

II. THE SITUATION OF UPROOTED CENTRAL AMERICANS

2. The Concerted Plan of Action in favour of Central American Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons, adopted at the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA), held at Guatemala City from 29 to 31 May 1989 (see A/44/527 and Corr.1 and 2, annex), is now it its fifth and final year. The period since the adoption by the Assembly of resolution 47/103 has been marked by the intensification of efforts by UNHCR to consolidate and, where necessary, achieve durable solutions for uprooted Central Americans, either through local integration in countries of asylum or voluntary repatriation. As a result of progress achieved through the Central American

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* A/48/150 and Corr.1

peace agreements and the CIREFCA process, nearly 100,000 persons are estimated to have repatriated to, or returned to their areas of origin in, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala since mid-1987. The number of Central American refugees receiving international assistance, which totalled 150,000 in May 1989, has since decreased by some 50 per cent. While provision of reliable data on the number of internally and externally displaced persons remains a difficult task, it is clear that these two groups continue to comprise the majority of CIREFCA target populations. Their protection and assistance needs thus remain an important priority for CIREFCA. It will be recalled that in May 1989, these populations together comprised over 80 per cent of the total of 2 million Central Americans estimated to have been uprooted by the regional conflicts.

3. Following the agreement signed on 8 October 1992 between the Government of Guatemala and the Permanent Commissions of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico, the first organized collective repatriation movement from Mexico of Guatemalan refugees took place in January 1993, with the return of a group of 2,400 persons. This event was an important breakthrough in efforts to find durable solutions for the largest single remaining case-load of Central American refugees. It is anticipated that additional groups of the 50,000 Guatemalan refugees remaining in Mexico will eventually repatriate, including some 7,700 in 1993. Through the $11.6 million repatriation and reintegration programme launched by UNHCR in April 1993, Quick Impact Projects are being implemented in several communities in Guatemala with the aim of meeting their most basic and urgent needs and facilitating social and economic recovery. In Mexico, local integration through CIREFCA projects will continue to be supported for those Guatemalan refugees who do not opt to return.

4. As far as Nicaraguan and Salvadorian refugees are concerned, the major repatriation movements which took place in the first phase of CIREFCA are now completed. Through CIREFCA programmes in the first quarter of 1993, UNHCR supported local integration in countries of asylum (Belize and Costa Rica) and reintegration programmes in countries of origin (El Salvador and Nicaragua). The largest of these, the $12 million Quick Impact Project programme in Nicaragua, concluded in June 1993 and directly benefited 70,000 returnees, demobilized combatants and local populations. A total of 350 Quick Impact Project micro-projects in basic services and productive activities has been implemented since the programme's inception in late 1991.

III. CONTINUED CONTRIBUTION OF CIREFCA TO REGIONAL PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

5. Through its activities on behalf of uprooted populations, CIREFCA has continued to contribute to regional peace efforts in Central America launched at Esquipulas in 1987 (A/42/521-S/19085, annex) and to benefit from the firm political and financial support of the international community. This support was evidenced by the Conclusion on CIREFCA adopted at the forty-third session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (A/AC.96/804, para. 28 (e)) in October 1992. On that occasion, the Executive Committee, inter alia, endorsed the efforts of the Central American countries, Belize and Mexico, on behalf of uprooted populations, especially by promoting respect for fundamental protection and human rights principles and through the inclusion of these populations in national development plans. The Committee also approved

new inter-agency arrangements proposed by UNHCR and UNDP for technical support and follow-up of CIREFCA, whereby the "lead agency" role would be conferred on UNDP in mid-1993 for the remaining duration of the Concerted Plan of Action, with the objective of strengthening integration and reintegration processes. During the forty-third session of the Executive Committee, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees stressed that UNHCR operations in Central America would continue throughout and beyond the duration of the Concerted Plan of Action, in line with the mandate of her Office.

6. In 1993, support for CIREFCA was also demonstrated at the Ninth Ministerial Conference between the European Community and its member States and Central America (the "San José IX Summit"), held in San Salvador on 22 and 23 February 1993. On this occasion, the Ministers, in their final Joint Political and Economic Communiqué of the Summit, called, inter alia, for increased resources to be made available for remaining refugee programmes as well as for sustainable development programmes on behalf of returnees and displaced persons in the region, in line with priorities identified by the seven convening countries in the framework of CIREFCA.

IV. FOLLOW-UP OF THE CONCERTED PLAN OF ACTION

7. The renewed commitment of the international community to the objectives and principles of CIREFCA evidenced during the Second International Meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee held in San Salvador in April 1992 (CIREFCA/CS/92/11), has since been further reflected in the continued cooperation at the international, regional and national levels among convening countries, the donor community, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations system. A number of major follow-up activities have been undertaken since the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

A. CIREFCA Follow-up Committee

8. The seven convening countries (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua), members of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee, have continued to meet at regular intervals. The Committee's chairmanship was exercised by Nicaragua until October 1992, at which time this function was assumed by El Salvador. As agreed by the seven convening States, Mexico will assume the presidency from August 1993 until the conclusion of the process in May 1994. In these meetings, discussions have included the funding status of CIREFCA projects, the role of NGOs and the strategy/implementation of the human development concept, promoted by UNDP within the context of the transition-to-development stage already under way in certain countries in the region.

B. Involvement by non-governmental organizations in CIREFCA

9. The role of NGOs continues to be important both in terms of project implementation and advocacy on behalf of uprooted Central Americans. Recent activities, invariably pursued through the CIREFCA Support Groups in the various countries, have centred on the role in and contribution of NGOs to integration and reintegration processes involving CIREFCA's four target populations:

refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and externally displaced persons. In this respect, links between NGOs and UNDP were strengthened as a result of the UNDP/NGO seminar, held in Managua in March 1993, with the participation of some 80 representatives of the Regional Association for Forced Migration (ARMIF), the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and other NGOs working with uprooted populations. Other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes present included UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Food Programme (WFP). UNDP/NGO cooperation will be further strengthened through similar workshops at the national level.

C. Support by the United Nations system

10. Within the framework of the Joint Task Force created within the United Nations to follow up the CIREFCA process, UNHCR and UNDP have continued to meet and consult with the United Nations Secretariat to coordinate policy within the context of the Secretary-General's continued support for the Central American peace process and the Special Programme of Economic Cooperation for Central America. In mid-April 1993, a high-level meeting of the Joint Task Force took place with the dual purpose of analysing progress in the Central American peace process and finalizing arrangements for the transfer of "lead agency" role from UNHCR to UNDP as of 1 July 1993.

11. As part of those arrangements, a senior UNDP expert has assumed the function of Head of the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit, based in San José, Costa Rica. In line with the specific request addressed to the High Commissioner by the forty-third session of the Executive Committee in October 1992, however, UNHCR will continue to play an active role in technical support and follow-up to CIREFCA until the conclusion of the CIREFCA process. Consequently, the respective financial contributions of UNHCR and UNDP to the Joint Support Unit remain roughly equal.

12. The Joint Support Unit thus continues to maintain close contact with all CIREFCA participants. The Unit maintains contact with the Governments of the seven convening countries in order to provide technical support for projects and organizational support for various CIREFCA activities, including the sessions of the Follow-up Committee and National Support Groups. Regular contacts are also maintained with the donor and NGO community at local/regional level in relation to CIREFCA activities and evolving funding requirements and priorities. Major emphasis in this final consolidation phase of CIREFCA is being laid on training activities for the benefit of all CIREFCA participants. UNHCR has financed two workshops in 1993 on the methodology and implementation of the Quick Impact Projects, based on the experience gained in Nicaragua.

13. A gender-sensitive focus has increased greatly since the holding of the First Regional Forum on a Gender Approach to Work with Refugee, Returnee and Displaced Women in Central America in February 1992 and has become a key aspect of CIREFCA activities. To support this effort, a consultant funded by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) joined the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit in February 1993. Among the objectives of the consultancy is the preparation of a methodology for the incorporation of due sensitivity to gender issues in the design, implementation and follow-up of new CIREFCA projects and

the establishment of a training plan for officials working with uprooted women. In line with this effort, all UNHCR programmes in Central America have been revised to ensure the full participation of women.

D. Resource mobilization for CIREFCA projects

14. Since the beginning of the CIREFCA process in 1989, a total of 153 projects are recorded in the seven countries, with total external funding requirements of $335.7 million. These figures include both the projects presented by the Follow-up Committee to the international community in its meetings in New York (June 1990) and San Salvador (April 1992) as well as projects and initiatives financed by donors within the framework of CIREFCA. In addition, through the Development Programme for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Repatriated Persons (PRODERE), with its six national projects and three regional subprogrammes, a total of $121.9 million has been committed. The overall funding situation for CIREFCA projects (excluding PRODERE) for the period May 1989 to January 1993 is as follows: a total of $240.1 million has been mobilized, leaving a shortfall of $95 million (28.5 per cent of the total). Estimates on the channelling of CIREFCA funds are as follows: 38 per cent of contributions have been made through NGOs, 32 per cent through Governments of the region, 24 per cent through UNHCR and the remainder through other channels.

15. Given the evolution of the situation of uprooted populations in the region in recent months, the CIREFCA project package is currently being reviewed with a view to presenting donors with updated needs ranked according to priority. As part of this exercise, UNHCR's budgetary requirements (revised 1993 and initial 1994) are presently estimated at $40 million. At the same time, UNDP is making efforts to make multilateral development institutions aware of the need to support the incorporation of CIREFCA populations into long-term development plans.

E. Progress on protection-related issues

16. In line with the stated principles and objectives of the CIREFCA Plan of Action, the seven CIREFCA countries have continued to adopt national policies aimed at improving the international protection and legal status of refugees and displaced persons. In countries of asylum, Governments have implemented legislation aimed at furthering the local integration process. Thus, in Costa Rica, an Executive Decree, issued in November 1992, permits the full integration of some 30,000 Central American refugees by allowing them to opt for resident status. In Mexico, following the amendment of the General Population Law in July 1992 to incorporate the definition of a "refugee", drawing on the broadened definition contained in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, standardized procedures to determine refugee status were established in August 1992. In Belize, the Government carried out a public awareness campaign with the support of UNHCR in late 1992 to make the population aware of the benefits gained through the presence of refugees in that country.

17. Countries of origin have also made progress in protection-related matters. In El Salvador, documentation activities are closely linked to reintegration programmes. The documentation effort has been divided into two phases: first,

the reconstruction of municipal registries destroyed during the war and secondly, the issue of personal identity documents for an anticipated total of some 500,000 persons. This activity is of crucial importance since it will allow the beneficiaries to register to vote in the upcoming elections scheduled to take place in March 1994. In the case of Guatemala, the collective return of some 2,400 Guatemalan refugees from Mexico was preceded by a series of agreements between the Government of Guatemala, UNHCR and the representatives of the refugees in which basic principles related to voluntary repatriation, including monitoring by UNHCR of the safety of returnees, were reaffirmed.

18. In line with the specific request contained in the Declaration of the Second International Meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee in San Salvador in April 1992 (CIREFCA/CS/92/11), UNHCR and UNDP are updating the CIREFCA legal document ("Principles and Criteria for the Protection of an Assistance to Central American Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Latin America" (CIREFCA/89/9)). This task involves an analysis of progress achieved in the adoption and/or application of laws or administrative measures for the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees and in voluntary repatriation and local integration, in the treatment and protection of internally displaced persons and non-recognized refugees. The views of the Governments of the convening countries and other concerned parties will be sought throughout the exercise.